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THE GOOD PRINCE

VERTIGO

F A B L E S™

68



Feb 08

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"SO, ON THAT FATEFUL NIGHT OF FOUL TREACHERY, FLYCATCHER'S GREAT AND TERRIBLE SPIRIT HOST CLOSED WITH GENERAL HILDEBRAND'S DISHONORED ARMY, SENDING THOSE MORTAL TROOPS SCATTERING IN FEAR AND PANIC."

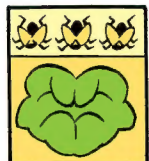
STAND YOUR GROUND!

STAND AND FIGHT, YOU FILTHY GOB COWARDS!

KINGDOM

Chapter Eight of The Good Prince

In which many diverse armies attack the kingdom of Haven, a father talks to his son, and a great king makes the last best sacrifice for his people.



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"BUT NO ONE--MAN, TROLL OR GOBLIN--COULD STAND HIS GROUND AGAINST SUCH A FORCE. FLY'S GHOST ARMY WAS IMBUED WITH AMAZING POWERS.

"THEY RAKED DEEP WITHIN THE MINDS OF THE EMPIRE'S SOLDIERS, DREDGING UP IMAGES OF EVERY SIN FROM THEIR PAST--EVERY MAN AND CREATURE WHO DIED SCREAMING UNDER THEIR SWORDS.

"EVERY HORROR THEY'D EVER PERPETRATED, WITNESSED OR EVEN IMAGINED WAS PLAYED OUT AGAIN IN STARK AND GRAPHIC DETAIL, WITHIN THE DARKEST PITS OF THEIR PSYCHES.

"THE IMPERIAL SOLDIERS HAD NO WILL TO FIGHT BACK, AND NO WAY TO DO IT, EVEN IF THEY COULD SOMEHOW RESURRECT THEIR SHATTERED COURAGE.

"THEY PLEADED AND WAILED FOR MERCY, AND THEY CRIED LIKE SCARED CHILDREN--BUT MOSTLY THEY RAN, AS FAR AND FAST AS THEIR FEET COULD CARRY THEM.

"THE ENTIRE SIXTEENTH HORDE SCATTERED TO THE FOUR WINDS. IT CEASED TO EXIST AS AN ARMY THAT DAY."

THE FARM, FABLETOWN'S UPSTATE NEW YORK ANNEX.

LATER WE HEARD THE EMPIRE ELITES HUNTED DOWN EVERY SOLDIER OF THE SIXTEENTH THEY COULD FIND, OFFICER AND RANKER ALIKE.

THEY EXECUTED THEM BY THE THOUSANDS OUTSIDE THE GATES OF THE IMPERIAL CITY.

BUT THAT'S TERRIBLE! DID ANY GET AWAY?

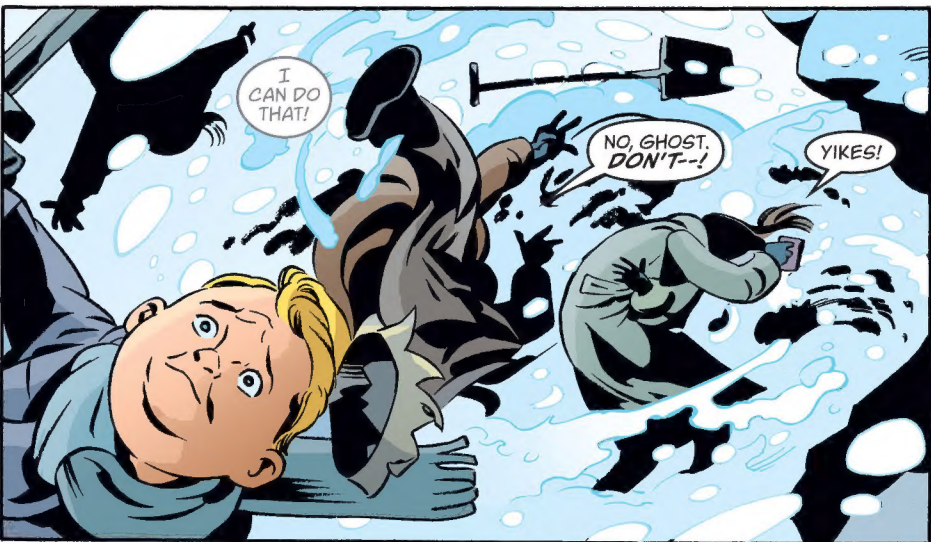
SOME.

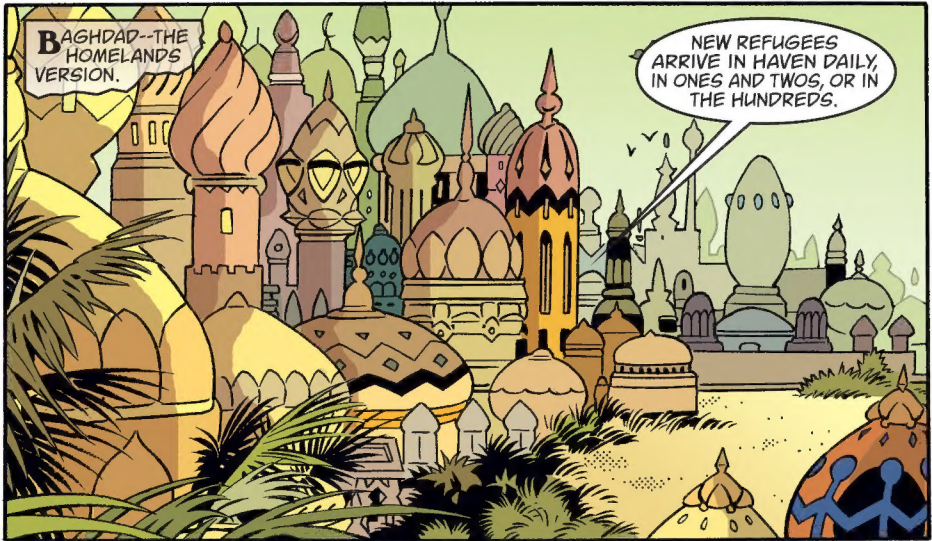
IRONICALLY ENOUGH, MOST OF THOSE WHO ESCAPED THE EMPEROR'S WRATH DID SO BY RETURNING TO HAVEN.

"THEY SWORE OFF THEIR OLD VASSALAGE TO THE EMPIRE AND BENT KNEES TO ENTER FLY'S SERVICE."

REMAIN LOYAL AND KEEP TO MY LAWS AND YOU'LL PROSPER HERE IN COMFORT AND SAFETY. UNLIKE IN THE EMPIRE, FEAR DOESN'T RULE THE LIVES OF MY SUBJECTS.

SO, RISE THEN AS CITIZENS OF HAVEN.





BAGHDAD--THE HOMELANDS VERSION.

NEW REFUGEES ARRIVE IN HAVEN DAILY, IN ONES AND TWOS, OR IN THE HUNDREDS.



FLYCATCHER'S KINGDOM IS EXPANDING RAPIDLY.

SOON IT WILL FILL THE ENTIRE VALLEY, AND IN TIME IT WILL SPILL **BEYOND**--THREATENING THE NEIGHBORING KINGDOMS STILL LOYAL TO THE EMPIRE.



AH, BUT HOW THIN CAN KING CATCHFLY'S POWERS SPREAD **BEFORE** THEY DIMINISH?



IN **ENGLISH**, ALADDIN! **ENGLISH!**

THIS IS STILL A CLASSROOM.



FABLE-TOWN.

SO HERE'S WHERE YOU'VE BEEN HIDING, RIDING HOOD.



OH, FRAU TOTENKINDER. I DIDN'T SEE YOU.

I ONLY JUST ARRIVED, DEAR.



HOW OFTEN DO YOU MOPE DOWN HERE IN THIS DANK, DARK BASEMENT?

THIS IS WHERE AMBROSE LIVED, AND I--

--I JUST MISS HIM IS ALL.



THEN WHY STAY IN FABLETOWN? GO VISIT HIM, IF THAT'S WHAT YOU DESIRE.

BUT HOW--?



BOY BLUE TRAVELS BACK AND FORTH ALL THE TIME.

YOU ALREADY KNOW BETTER THAN ANYONE HIS WONDROUS WITCHING CLOAK CAN CARRY PASSENGERS.





YNNES--AN IMPERIAL WORLD IN THE HOMELANDS.

SEE? THEY'RE EVERYWHERE OUT HERE, CAPTAIN. THE LOCALS **SWEAR** THEY FLOATED DOWN FROM THE CLOUDS LIKE A FALL OF SNOW.

MAGIC OF A MOST INSIDIOUS NATURE.



BURN YONDER VILLAGE TO THE **GROUND**, SERGEANT. WE'LL **TEACH** THESE PEASANT WRETCHES THE PRICE OF SEDITION.


HOW CAN WE KNOW THEY HAD ANYTHING TO DO WITH IT, SIR?



SOMEONE NEEDS TO BE PUNISHED FOR THIS, OR IT'LL BE **OUR** HEADS ON THE CHOPPING BLOCKS. THIS VILLAGE IS CLOSEST TO THE INCIDENT, AND THEREFORE THE MOST LOGICAL PERPETRATORS.

TWO OF YOU TORCH THE TOWN. YOU OTHERS RIDE DOWN AND **SLAY** THOSE WHO TRY TO RUN.





THE IMPERIAL CITY--THE DARK HEART OF EMPIRE.

I'M NOT ARGUING, FATHER. I JUST DON'T SEE THE WISDOM IN SLAYING SO MANY OF OUR OWN CITIZENS FOR WHAT ARE CLEARLY THE ACTIONS OF STRANGERS AND OUTSIDE AGITATORS.

UP UNTIL NOW OUR POPULATIONS THROUGHOUT THE MYRIAD CONQUERED WORLDS HAVE BEEN REASONABLY COWED AND PACIFIED.

BUT THIS RECENT POLICY OF PUNISHING SO MANY WILLY-NILLY IS IN DANGER OF CAUSING THE VERY UNREST IT'S INTENDED TO QUELL.

ANY HINT OF TREASON NEEDS TO BE NIPPED IN THE BUD, MY SON, LEST IT SPREAD FOR CERTAIN.

IN MOST CASES, SIMPLY BEING EXPOSED TO SEDITIOUS ACTS OR MATERIAL IS AS BAD AS ACTUALLY PERPETRATING IT.

SOME MUST DIE FOR WHAT THEY INADVERTENTLY WITNESSED, FOR HUMAN BEHAVIOR NEVER CHANGES.

FOLKS WILL GOSSIP ABOUT WHAT THEY SEE AND THUS AID THE ENEMY. THE POISON SLOWLY AND SURELY DISSEMINATES THROUGH THE BODY OF OUR EMPIRE.





IN THE LONG RUN, IT'S NOT AS IMPORTANT THAT WE EXECUTE THE **RIGHT** PEOPLE.

AS LONG AS WE PUBLICLY PUNISH **SOMEONE**, ANY SOMEONE WILL DO.

THE PEOPLE WILL GET THE MESSAGE THAT THEY'D BEST NOT HARBOR SUCH CRIMINALS--OR ELSE.

SOON ENOUGH THEY'LL START TURNING IN THE **REAL** TRAITORS TO SAVE THEMSELVES.

I'D GLADLY DESTROY THOUSANDS, OR TENS OF THOUSANDS, OR EVEN **HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS**, TO ENSURE THAT OUR MILLIONS CONTINUE TO LIVE IN SAFETY AND PROSPERITY.

IT'S THE SIMPLE CALCULUS OF BENEVOLENT GOVERNANCE. A GREAT LEADER IS ONE WHO WON'T SHIRK FROM DOING THE OFTEN TERRIBLE THINGS THAT ARE REQUIRED TO PROTECT THE MAJORITY.

IT SEEMS A PARADOX, BUT YOU MUST OFTEN DO A GREAT EVIL TO ACCOMPLISH AN EVEN GREATER GOOD.

KEEP YOUR HEART HARD, SON. THAT'S THE ETERNAL PRICE OF BEING PARENT TO ENTIRE WORLDS.

OTHERS CAN OCCASIONALLY **AFFORD** TO INDULGE THEIR NATURAL COMPASSION, SON, BUT NOT US.

THERE, THAT'S DONE.

A TOUCH OF PAINT AND YOU'RE GOOD AS NEW.

WE NEED TO KEEP UP ON YOUR REGULAR MAINTENANCE, SO THAT THE GROUND-LINGS ALWAYS SEE AN AGELESS, UNCHANGING AND **INVINCIBLE** EMPEROR RULING OVER THEM.



AND JUST OUTSIDE OF THAT AUGUST CHAMBER...

LOOK! DO YOU *SEE* THIS, SHERE-KHAN?

WE'VE BECOME *MUCH* MORE SUBSTANTIAL SINCE OUR LATEST TREATMENT! I CAN ACTUALLY LIFT THIS CUP IF I CONCENTRATE HARD ENOUGH!

I HAVE *EYES*, BRIDEKILLER. I MAY BE DEAD, BUT I'M NOT *BLIND*.



AMAZING! I ACTUALLY *FELT* IT IN MY HAND-- AND WAS ABLE TO LIFT IT FOR NEARLY A MINUTE!

I WISH THESE PAMPERED COURT WARLOCKS WERE QUICKER AND MORE SKILLED WITH THEIR CRAFT.

AFTER MONTHS OF TREATMENTS, I'M RESTORED ENOUGH TO BE *RAVENOUS* AGAIN, BUT STILL NOT SOLID ENOUGH TO ACTUALLY *EAT*.

WHAT'S THE HOLDUP, GEOFFREY?

WHY ARE WE BEING KEPT COOLING OUR HEELS OUT HERE IN THE *ANTE-CHAMBER* WHEN WE'VE SO MUCH PRESSING BUSINESS TO ATTEND TO *INSIDE*?

YOU'D KNOW IF YOU ACTUALLY *ARRIVED* IN TIME, MONTY. HIS LORDSHIP'S IN THERE FOR HIS MONTHLY PRIVATE SESSION WITH THAT FUNNY LITTLE WOOD-CARVER FROM THE STICKS.

AGAIN? DEAR *GODS*, ABOVE AND BELOW, WHATEVER DO THE TWO OF THEM FIND TO *TALK* ABOUT EACH MONTH?

BEATS ME. DO YOU KNOW I WAS ACTUALLY *CHASTISED* FOR TALKING BRUSQUELY TO THE OLD FELLOW LAST TIME?



AND BACK
IN THE
EMPEROR'S
PRIVATE
AUDIENCE
CHAMBER...

THANK
YOU, FATHER.
YOUR COUNSEL IS
ALWAYS WISE AND
WELCOME.


BEFORE YOU
GO WE SHOULD TALK
OVER THE MATTER OF
HAVEN. THIS JANITOR
KING OF THEIRS
WIELDS INVINCIBLE
SORCERIES.

I UNDERSTAND
HIS POWERS, THOUGH
IMPRESSIVE, ARE SEVERELY
LOCALIZED. THEY ONLY
WORK WITHIN THE POSTED
BOUNDARIES OF HIS OWN
LANDS, ISN'T THAT
SO?



MY LANDS,
FATHER, NOT
HIS.

BUT IT'S
TRUE. HIS MAGICAL
AUTHORITY SEEMS
ABSOLUTE ON THE
GROUND HE'S
OCCUPIED.



I CAN'T
AFFORD TO SPEND
ANOTHER ARMY IN
A FRUITLESS EFFORT
TO OVERTHROW HIM BY
FORCE OF ARMS. HELL
AND DAMNATION, I
DON'T **HAVE**
ANOTHER ARMY
TO SPARE.

AND MARCHING
ON HIM HAS BECOME THE
SUREST WAY TO DELIVER NEW
RECRUITS INTO HIS EVER-
SWELLING RANKS.

SO WHAT DO YOU INTEND TO DO?

I'VE BEEN THINKING ABOUT SIMPLY **IGNORING** HIM. YES, I KNOW THAT SEEMS A COWARDLY SURRENDER AT FIRST GLANCE, BUT CONSIDER IT.

WE LAY AN IMPENETRABLE BLOCKADE AROUND HAVEN, FAR ENOUGH OUT SO THAT HIS POWERS DON'T AFFECT US, SO THAT NO NEW MEN AND RESOURCES CAN FLOCK TO HIM.

AND PROVIDED OUR SIEGE IS **STRONG** ENOUGH—KEPT WATERTIGHT—WE CAN ENSURE THAT NO FURTHER NEWS GETS OUT ABOUT HAVEN.

IN TIME OUR PEOPLE WILL FORGET HAVEN WAS EVER THERE.

AND WHAT HAPPENS WHEN THIS KING DECIDES TO EXPAND HIS BORDERS TO **INCLUDE** LAND OCCUPIED BY YOUR BLOCKADE FORCES?

WILL HIS UNBEATABLE POWERS SPREAD OUT TO ENCOMPASS **THEM**?


I DON'T KNOW. REASON DICTATES THAT THERE HAS TO BE AN UPWARD **LIMIT** TO IT. MAGIC, LIKE ANY OTHER COMMODITY, MUST BE GATHERED AND STORED IN FINITE AMOUNTS.

DOES IT?

THE UPSTART KING HAS MOVED HIS BOUNDARY MARKERS OUT THREE TIMES SINCE WE BEGAN WATCHING HIM, **DOUBLING**, OR MORE, THE SIZE OF HIS HOLDINGS WITH EACH EXPANSION.

AND YET, TO DATE, THERE'S NO SIGN HIS WELL'S IN ANY **DANGER** OF RUNNING DRY.

WITHIN THOSE MARKERS, EVEN WHEN FRESHLY PLACED, HIS POWERS RULE **ABSOLUTE**, WHEREAS OUR WARLOCKS AND SORCERERS SUDDENLY LOSE ALL OF THEIR CRAFT.




NO, MY SON. YOU CAN'T SOLVE THIS PROBLEM BY **IGNORING** IT. WE NEED TO CRUSH THIS CANCER IN OUR MIDST--**QUICKLY** AND FINALLY.



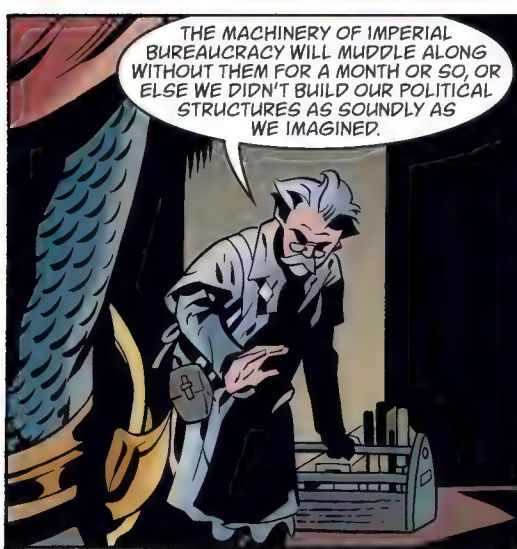
THIS IS WHY WE'VE PLANNED CONTINGENCIES FOR JUST SUCH AN UNEXPECTED EMPIRE-WIDE EMERGENCY.

SEND OUT YOUR FAST MESSENGERS TO EVERY WORLD. SUMMON ALL OF YOUR BROTHERS HOME FROM THEIR DUTY STATIONS AMONG THE VARIOUS HORDES AND ADMINISTRATIVE DISTRICTS.


I'M ORDERING THE FORMATION OF A **GOLDEN HORDE**.




BUT FATHER, THAT WOULD STRIP THE EMPIRE BARE OF NEARLY EVERY WOODEN SOLDIER IN EVERY POSITION OF POWER.



THE MACHINERY OF IMPERIAL BUREAUCRACY WILL MUDDLE ALONG WITHOUT THEM FOR A MONTH OR SO, OR ELSE WE DIDN'T BUILD OUR POLITICAL STRUCTURES AS SOUNDLY AS WE IMAGINED.




BUT MY WOODEN SONS AREN'T SUBJECT TO A FEAR OF GHOSTS, AND NO MAGIC IN **ANY** WORLD IS GREATER THAN THAT WHICH ISSUES FROM THE SACRED GROVE.



A SINGLE HORDE, COMPOSED ENTIRELY OF WOODEN SOLDIERS--TWENTY FULL LEGIONS' WORTH--WILL CONQUER, WHERE YOUR FRAGILE ARMIES OF FLESH HAVE **FAILED**.

BUT, FATHER--

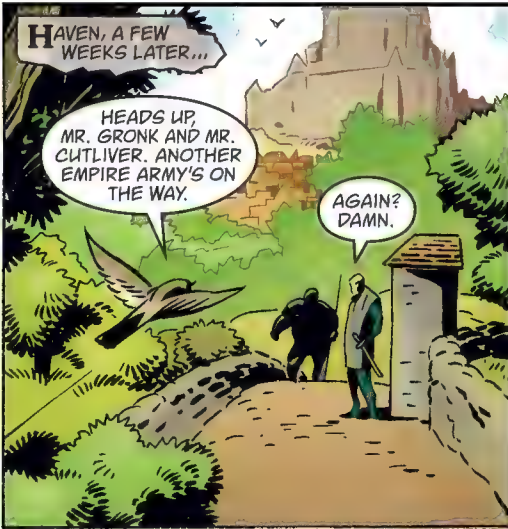


I'LL HEAR NO MORE OF IT. MY MIND IS MADE UP. FORM THE GOLDEN HORDE AND SEND THEM MARCHING ON HAVEN. RAZE IT TO THE GROUND.

SLAUGHTER **EVERYONE**, EVEN UNTO THE SMALLEST CHILD. SOW ITS FIELDS WITH SALT AND LEAVE NO STONE STANDING ON ANOTHER.

B

B



HAVEN, A FEW WEEKS LATER...

HEADS UP, MR. GRONK AND MR. CUTLIVER. ANOTHER EMPIRE ARMY'S ON THE WAY.

AGAIN? DAMN.



THAT MEANS WEYLAND WILL BE PUTTING US TO WORK BUILDING ANOTHER BARRACKS FOR THE NEW RECRUITS.

I WONDER IF KING AMBROSE WILL LET US FIGHT THIS TIME. I MISS CHOPPING HEADS AND SUCH.



I DOUBT IT. ONLY THE GHOSTS GET TO FIGHT, AND EVEN THEY DON'T GET TO KILL NO ONE.

♪



♪



♪

SMITH TOWN
JOHN'S MEADOW
GRETELS GROVE
GOBL TOWN



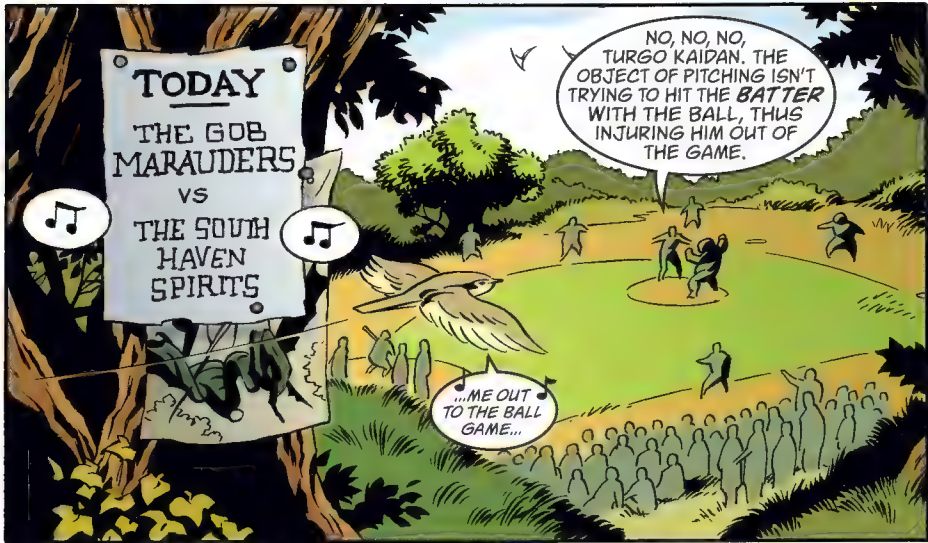
HEY, WEYLAND, HAVE YOU SEEN THE KING? WE'RE BEING INVADED AGAIN.

NOT LATELY, BUT SURE AS CERTAIN HE'LL BE *SOMEWHERE* PLAYING WITH THE IMMIGRANT KIDS.



OH WAIT, I REMEMBER NOW. HE'S OFFICIATING AT TODAY'S *BASEBALL* GAME.

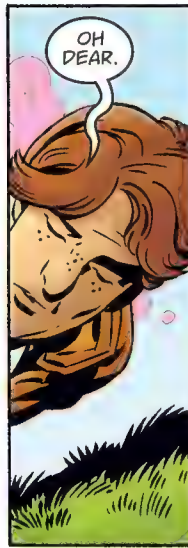






--MORROW? WOW.
I SUDDENLY
FEEL--

SIRE?



OH
DEAR.



THE
KING'S
DOWN!



SOMEONE
RUN FOR
HELP!

NO, DON'T
FRET, IT'S--

--I THINK I
KNOW--

--I'M OKAY.
HONEST. I JUST
DIDN'T REALIZE THE
END WOULD COME
THIS SOON.



A FEW MINUTES
LATER...

HE WAS
AWAKE AND TALKING
WHEN I LEFT HIM, BUT
HE COLLAPSED AND
NEARLY FAINED!

HURRY!



FINALLY!

MY
COUNSELORS ARE
HERE, SO THE REST OF
YOU KINDLY STOP HOVERING
AROUND ME WITH YOUR
FUNERERAL FACES. I
PROMISE I'M ALL
RIGHT.





WHAT IS IT? WHAT'S **WRONG**, FLY?

SO, JOHN, WHEN YOU'RE AFRAID I'M **DYING**, YOU FINALLY CALL ME FLY. THAT'S A SMALL BLESSING AT LEAST.

DO SOME GOOD, YOU THREE. HELP YOUR CLUMSY KING TO HIS FEET.



DON'T WORRY, GENTLEMEN. I'M FINE FOR NOW. IT'S JUST THAT A WEIRD FEELING CAME OVER ME WHEN I REALIZED WHO'D COME THIS TIME TO FIGHT US. I WASN'T READY FOR IT.



SO IT'S ANOTHER EMPIRE ARMY, I DON'T UNDERSTAND WHY THAT SHOULD DISTRESS YOU **NOW**. TIME AND AGAIN YOU'VE SHOWN HOW EASILY YOU CAN **BEAT** THEM.



THIS ISN'T JUST ANY EMPIRE ARMY, LANCE. THIS IS THE ONE I'VE BEEN **WAITING** FOR--THE ONE I WAS SENT HERE TO FACE. FOR GOOD OR ILL, THIS ENDS IT. THIS IS MY LAST BATTLE.

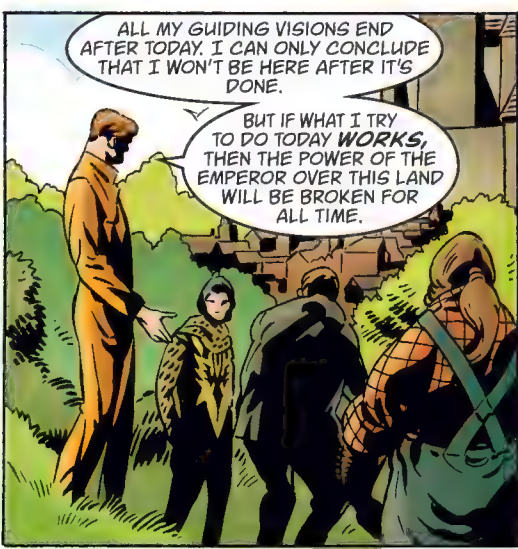
I ONLY WISH I'D HAD MORE TIME TO SEE THIS KINGDOM **GROW** BEFORE--



PROMISE ME, ALL THREE OF YOU, THAT YOU'LL STAY HERE AFTER I'M GONE--THAT YOU'LL CONTINUE WHAT WE'VE ONLY JUST STARTED HERE.



I DON'T LIKE THE WAY YOU'RE TALKING, SIR. IT'S AS IF YOU PLAN TO--



ALL MY GUIDING VISIONS END AFTER TODAY. I CAN ONLY CONCLUDE THAT I WON'T BE HERE AFTER IT'S DONE.

BUT IF WHAT I TRY TO DO TODAY **WORKS**, THEN THE POWER OF THE EMPEROR OVER THIS LAND WILL BE BROKEN FOR ALL TIME.



IF THAT COSTS ME MY LIFE, THEN IT'S MORE THAN A FAIR PRICE TO PAY.

LANCE, STAY HERE TO TAKE DOWN MY FINAL MESSAGE TO THE EMPEROR. WEYLAND, KEEP EVERYONE AWAY FROM THE ENEMY.

I WON'T NEED THE GHOST ARMY THIS TIME.

AND JOHN, GO FETCH MY ARMOR, PLEASE. POLISH IT UP GOOD. WE DON'T WANT TO MAKE A BAD IMPRESSION ON OUR AUGUST GUESTS.

OF COURSE, SIR. AND YOUR SWORD TOO.

NO, I WON'T NEED EXCALIBUR THIS TIME. KEEP IT SAFE WITH YOU. BY ITS POWER YOU SHOULD ALL BE ABLE TO MAINTAIN YOUR SOLID LIVING FORMS, AS LONG AS YOU STAY WITHIN THE KINGDOM.

NOW, PLEASE BE ABOUT YOUR BUSINESS, GENTLEMEN. I'VE TREASURED YOUR COMPANY, BUT IT'S TIME TO FINISH OUR APPOINTED TASKS.

I MARVEL AT THIS MAGNIFICENT ARMY! AT LEAST FORTY THOUSAND STRONG--OR MORE. THEY CARRY NO FOOD OR SHELTER WITH THEM, NEEDING NONE.

THEY MARCH IN RIGID AND DISCIPLINED RANKS, NEEDING ONLY THEIR PERSONAL ARMS AND ARMOR TO TRAVEL DAYS AND LEAGUES.

I WALK OUT ALONE TO MEET THEM ON THE GREAT FIELD WEST OF THE CASTLE.

AND WITHOUT STRUGGLE OR PROTEST, I LET THEM TAKE ME.

GREETINGS, SOLDIERS OF THE SACRED GROVE. I AM AMBROSE THE FIRST, KING OF HAVEN.

MY GHOSTS CAN DO NAUGHT TO FRIGHTEN SUCH AS YOU, NOR CAN ANY MAGIC OF MINE CONQUER THE RAW POWER OF THE SACRED GROVE.

SO I WILLINGLY **SURRENDER** MYSELF AND ALL OF MY MAGIC TO YOU, TO ADD ITS POWER TO INCREASE YOUR OWN ARBOREAL MAGIC.



THEIR GRIP IS TENTATIVE AT FIRST--ALMOST GENTLE.



THAT DOESN'T LAST LONG. THEY'RE SOLDIERS AFTER ALL, AND HAVE NEVER HAD LOVE FOR THOSE OF US RUDELY MADE OF BLOOD AND MEAT AND BONE.



I EXPECTED A GREAT AND TERRIBLE BATTLE. WHAT DO WE DO WITH HIM NOW THAT HE JUST GAVE UP LIKE A MEATY COWARD?

WE BIND HIM. TAKE HIM ALIVE AND HUMILIATED BACK TO OUR BROTHER, THE EMPEROR.

IN THE END I THINK OF MY LONG-LOST WIFE AND MY BELOVED CHILDREN, WHO NEVER GOT TO GROW UP TO SAMPLE LIFE'S MANY JOYS AND SORROWS.



NO! THIS LACK OF RESISTANCE MAY BE **SUBTERFUGE** FOR LATER TRICKS!

WE'LL TAKE NO CHANCES.

AND I THINK OF MY DEAR FRIENDS, JOHN, WEYLAND AND LANCE, AND BOY BLUE AND OUR LOST FRIEND PINOCCHIO, AND ALL OF THOSE I LEFT BEHIND IN FABLETOWN.



BUT LAST OF ALL I THINK OF RIDING HOOD--DEAR, SWEET, LOVELY GIRL.

WE KILL HIM NOW.

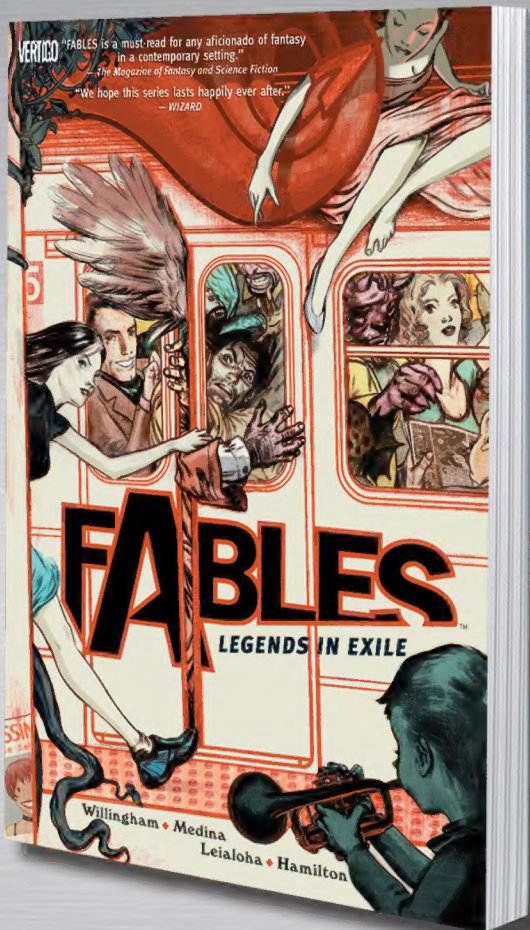
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BILL WILLINGHAM

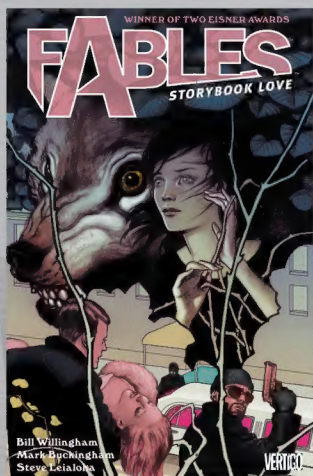
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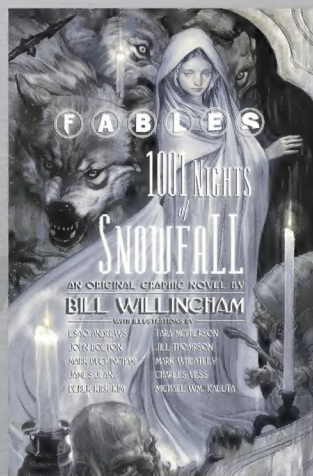
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